WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

Problems faced by paper industry

†1054. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn towards reduction in customs duty and making the import of machines used in paper industry duty-free by the Indian paper industry;

(b) if so, the steps taken by Government to solve the problems faced by the Indian paper industry;

(c) whether it is also a fact that this industry is facing hardships due to non-availability of raw material and non-utilization of modern technique; and

(d) if so, the steps taken by Government to remove these difficulties?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a) and (b) The basic custom duty on import of machinery used in paper industry has been recently reduced from 12.5% to 7.5%.

(c) Yes, Sir. There is shortage of good quality cellulosic raw material.

(d) The steps taken by the Government include rationalization of duty structure, for import of wood chips, pulp and waste paper, funding of Research & Development projects in the field of raw material & process research and quality upgradation, etc.

Pending issues of subsidy and funds for Growth Centre in Sikkim

1055. SHRI O.T. LEPCHA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that two issues, pertaining to Sikkim, for releasing of funds for Growth Centre and Central Investment Subsidy and Transport Subsidy, are pending with Government;

(b) if so, since when and the reasons therefor; and

(c) the details of the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION, MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR): (a) to (c) The Samlik-Marchak Growth Centre was sanctioned for Sikkim on 7.11.2003 with an estimated project cost of Rs. 3,175.88 lakhs with the central Government share of Rs. 1500 lakhs. For this, central assistance of Rs. 600 lakhs has been released till date. Further central assistance for this Growth Centre could not be released as Government of Sikkim has not furnished utilization certificate for the earlier release of Rs. 100 lakhs.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Under the Transport Subsidy Scheme and the Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme, a sum of Rs. 311 lakhs and Rs. 126 lakhs respectively has been released in the Tenth Five Year Plan for disbursal against pending claims, the last release being in January, 2007. The processing of claims and release of funds is a continuous process.

Prefrential trade agreement between India and Israel

1056. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the study group of India and Israel recommended for a Preferential Trade Agreement between India and Israel;

(b) if so, whether negotiations on this was held with the recently visited Deputy Prime Minister of Israel;

(c) if so, the areas of discussion;

(d) whether the issue of issuing long-term Visas to diamond traders of India has been raised; and

(e) if so, Israel's response thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Bilateral talks were held between Hon'ble Commerce and Industry Minister and the Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour of the State of Israel, during the latter's visit to India from December 2-8, 2006. The two Ministers reviewed the progress in implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Study Group set up by the two countries in December, 2004. They agreed to deepen the economic engagement between the two countries, and welcomed the establishment of an Indian bank in Israel and the continuing growth in the overall trade.

(d) Yes, Sir.

(e) The Government of Israel has since informed that one-year business visa (category B-1) would be issued to the diamond business persons of Indian origin.

Shortage of cement

1057. DR. V. MAITREYAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a huge deficit of cement requirement in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) what is the total production and consumption of cement both in private and public sectors in the country;